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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION: FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Emergency action to combat locust infestation in Africa

Report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

1. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/20 of 19 November 1993, on emergency action to combat locust infestation in Africa, the present report, prepared by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), is submitted to the Assembly by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in collaboration with the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

I. REVIEW OF THE GENERAL SITUATION

2. At the time of the adopticn of General Assembly resolution 48/20 in November 1993, the 1992-1994 desert locust upsurge had reached its mid-point. Infestations in eastern Africa and the Near East had been brought under control, and large-scale campaigns in India and Pakistan were concluded very successfully in November 1993. Campaigns in west and north-west Africa continued until mid-1994. By October 1994, the situation had also returned to normal in that region, and operations were concentrated on a few residual pockets of infestations. In all, nearly 4 million hectares were treated during the 1992-1994 upsurge.

II. CONTROL CAMPAIGNS

A. Implementation of emergency plans in west and north-west Africa

3. Recommendations adopted at the ad hoc FAO meeting on the desert locust situation in the Sahel and Maghreb countries, held at Tunis on 1 and 2 September 1993, and those proposed during the meeting of Ministers of Agriculture of Maghreb countries, held at Algiers on 27 September 1993, were implemented by the affected countries and regional organizations with support given through FAO and through bilateral assistance.

4. The campaigns in west and north-west Africa were coordinated at the international level through individual contacts between affected countries, regional organizations, the FAO and donors, through the FAO-organized donor meetings in Rome (mentioned in para. 9 below), and through a donor evaluation mission to Mauritania in May 1994, as well as through a special meeting of affected countries held in Nouakchott, Mauritania, in June 1994.

5. The most seriously affected countries in west Africa were Mauritania and Senegal. Infestations started in Mauritania around the middle of 1993, following invasions of the desert locust from the east. Considerable resources were mobilized and large-scale control operations were implemented between October 1993 and June 1994. By mid-1994, the situation in Mauritania was considered to be under control. Surveillance and treatment of isolated groups of locusts extended into the period from July to October 1994, and reports in September 1994 still indicated the presence of some residual infestations in Mauritania.

6. In Senegal, control operations were launched in October 1993 in response to an invasion from Mauritania. Those operations significantly reduced population levels, although some small swarms formed in December 1993 and moved to Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde and later to Guinea. Limited control operations were carried out in those countries.

7. Some small swarms reached southern Morocco in late October 1993. Subsequent infestations concentrated around the border between Morocco and Algeria. Control operations commenced in late February 1994 and were successfully concluded in July. The treated areas in north and west Africa were estimated to comprise approximately 1.1 million hectares.

B. Control campaigns in east Africa, the Near East and south-west Asia

8. Desert locust infestations in east Africa and the Near East were closely linked, given the contiguous geography of those two regions. Campaigns to control infestations were started in late 1992 in eastern Africa and the Near East and were concluded in mid-1993. Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Yemen were most seriously affected; extended areas of infestation were treated in those countries. Approximately 2.2 million infested hectares in east Africa and the

Near East were treated. Through the summer of 1994, the situation remained calm in east Africa and the Near East.

III. MOBILIZATION OF RESOURCES IN 1994

9. Shortly after taking office, the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, in view of the critical desert locust situation in west Africa, appealed to donors to consider additional assistance for surveillance and control operations. At two donor meetings convened at FAO headquarters in Rome on 18 January and 29 April 1994, control operations were harmonized and support was solicited from the international donor community for FAO-coordinated emergency campaigns. The meetings involved donor countries, donor institutions and affected countries.

10. It is estimated that donors and FAO provided more than US$ 43 million in assistance to affected countries for the 1992-1994 desert locust emergency campaigns. That included about $25 million in bilateral assistance, support through FAO trust funds totalling approximately $15 million, and support from regular FAO funds through its Technical Cooperation Programme, totalling approximately $3.4 million. The primary target countries for that assistance were locust-affected countries in west and east Africa; Yemen, Morocco and Algeria; and India and Pakistan. The Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations wishes to express once again his appreciation to all donors that have contributed resources to combat locust infestations in Africa and south-west Asia.

IV. REGULAR ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY FAO

11. Through its regular programme activities, FAO continued to provide affected countries and donors with monthly or fortnightly analyses of the desert locust situation, including forecasts of expected future developments. The FAO Emergency Centre for Locust Operations publishes a desert locust bulletin containing information on weather and ecological conditions, areas treated, desert locust reports and forecasts. The bulletin is distributed by fax to the plant protection services of affected countries and to interested donor organizations. Efforts are ongoing to upgrade this service by processing more detailed remote-sensing images and routinely analysing historical events for the forecasts. The FAO Global Information and Early Warning Service provides updates on locust infestations, as appropriate, in its "Food crops and shortages", "Food outlook", "Africa report", and "Sahel weather and crop report".

12. Studies on the effect of chemical locust-control methods on the environment have continued through a Netherlands-funded FAO project in Senegal. FAO has also continued to promote the development of improved control methods which would pose fewer risks to humans and the environment. A special workshop, organized in Morocco in May 1993, coordinated research efforts and recommended further action. Representatives from locust-affected countries, the scientific community, environmental organizations, donors and the private sector participated.

13. Various research groups are pursuing the development of new locust-control methods that are not based on the use of synthetic chemical pesticides. While it is expected that longer-term efforts will be required in order to find economically viable alternatives to chemical control, FAO also sees the possibility of reducing the use of pesticides by improving monitoring and forecasting methods which would make earlier and less-extensive intervention possible. In particular, further development of remote-sensing technology could improve monitoring of rainfall and vegetation cover, parameters which greatly influence desert locust populations, and would facilitate more timely and accurate detection of populations, and, hence, of control campaigns.

14. Training at various levels was provided by FAO in locust-affected countries during the past year. The activities were aimed at improving survey and monitoring operations and ensuring that pesticides are used safely, efficiently and in an environmentally acceptable manner. Training in the use of remote-sensing techniques in general are also made available to member States by FAO.

V. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

15. The campaigns to overcome the 1992-1994 desert locust upsurge were a collaborative effort between affected countries, regional organizations, donors and FAO. Efforts by the Governments of the affected countries were supported on a multilateral basis, through, for example, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), as well as on a bilateral basis.

16. Multilateral cooperation is also directed at improving locust-control methods through research. An example of international collaboration in this field is the desert locust research programme of the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology in Nairobi, Kenya, which is aimed at developing environmentally acceptable control methods. The programme is funded by IFAD, the United Nations Development Programme, Sweden and the Arab Fund, with FAO assistance in coordination. It is executed by scientists from various locust-affected countries and has already made important advances in knowledge of the biology of the desert locust. The development of biopesticides to be used against locusts and grasshoppers is being pursued by another multilateral programme executed by several international organizations and supported by North American and European donors.

VI. LONG-TERM DESERT LOCUST MANAGEMENT AIMED AT PREVENTING EMERGENCIES

17. Since 1986, frequent desert locust invasions have affected countries in northern and central Africa, in the Near East and in south-west Asia. The apparent increase in locust emergencies has caused considerable concern and initiated discussions on how these could be prevented in the future. Donors and locust-affected countries have urged FAO to review the current strategies for controlling and preventing desert locust outbreaks.

18. During the last decade, desert locust control operations have been constrained by a combination of factors:

(a) Since relatively few locust outbreaks occurred between 1969 and 1985, locust-affected countries had reassigned their priorities, which resulted in a weakening of locust-control services in those countries. The 1986-1989 plague and the 1992-1994 emergency overwhelmed the national plant protection services in eastern and western Africa, as well as in some countries of the Near East;

(b) Regional locust-control organizations have experienced increasing financial problems over the past decade and have lost much of their capacity to support national locust-control operations;

(c) Although FAO and donors are willing to respond quickly to desert locust emergencies, there are inevitably delays in arranging funding, hiring staff and purchasing pesticides, equipments and supplies;

(d) For environmental reasons, the pesticide dieldrin is no longer used for desert locust control. However, pesticides currently in use require more frequent applications and treatments over larger areas. At the same time, the high mobility of locust populations and other factors make it difficult to develop non-chemical, environmentally friendly control methods.

19. During its 106th session, held from 30 May to 1 June 1994, the FAO Council endorsed the Director-General's proposal to launch a special programme to establish an emergency prevention system (EMPRES) for transboundary animal and plant pests and diseases with an initial focus on rinderpest and locusts. The rationale for the programme is to permit FAO to assist member States particularly to prevent, but also to cope with emergencies linked to plant pests or animal disease outbreaks, especially those of a transboundary nature.

20. FAO has developed a concept paper on desert locust control within the framework of EMPRES and is currently consulting with experts, locust-affected countries and donors on implementation of the locust component of EMPRES which aims, inter alia, to address the above constraints. A major thrust is long-term locust management aimed at minimizing the risk of emergencies before they develop, rather than reacting to crises. It is envisaged that implementation of the programme would focus on the following areas:

(a) Strengthening of locust surveillance and control capacity of the affected countries;

(b) Improving international information exchange and collaboration, as well as national capacity to utilize that information;

(c) Establishing contingency arrangements which could respond immediately in cases where monitoring and control activities need to be intensified;

(d) Promoting and coordinating research aimed at developing more efficient methods for monitoring and control operations and at reducing the use of hazardous and environmentally damaging chemical pesticides.

21. FAO has allocated funds for start-up activities under the EMPRES initiative. It is hoped that additional support from the international donor community will be forthcoming. The EMPRES programme has recognized the Red Sea area as one of the areas that will require increased attention, and field activities are scheduled to begin there at the beginning of 1995. However, it is recognized that support to countries in such other regions as west Africa and south-west Asia will also be important in the future in order to achieve fully the main objective of the programme, namely, minimizing the risk of emergencies before they develop.